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Some Observations Upon Success In Life

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There is no royal speedway to success; in reality there is no road at all; you must make your own road over a rough country. Some find an easier way than others, due, in a few cases, to good luck. Some are stronger than others and go faster and further. Some find the way hard and progress slowly. But you may be sure that no one reaches success who does not try and who does not work hard for it.

It is true that some try and work hard and fail, but, in nine cases out of ten, there is a reason for it.

One reason that is very often found is the belief that influence or pull is the vehicle one can ride in on and thus save a lot of useless effort.

When a man or boy gets that idea into his head and can't eradicate it, he is lost. He is worshipping a graven image. I have known young men with real native ability who were thoroughly convinced that the principal officers of their concern sat up nights to hatch up conspiracies to prevent them from getting ahead. Such men, however able, will never make successes. So I would advise you to keep away from that error, an error greater now than ever before.

I have not yet reached the age of Methuzelah, but still I am getting along and have seen more or less of business life during the last forty years, but I have never seen a time which presented more opportunities for young men than the present. And that is not all. Never before have older men realized so thoroughly the necessity of passing on to the younger men their knowledge born of hard experience.

It is fortunate for young men and fortunate for the future of this country that business men are taking this interest in training young men to take their places, because the business man of tomorrow must have much more information and knowledge than is required today.

When I was a boy and began to work, there were no telephones, no electric cars, no automobiles, no electric lights and no typewriters, so we had more time to learn as we went along than the boys of today have.

What the boy of the future is going to do, if the present rate of progress and evolution is maintained, I don't know, unless the coming generations develop a larger brain capacity than we now have, but I do know that it behooves boys and young men to take the utmost advantage of any educational facilities that are offered them.

There are, however, some kinds of education which are being offered that I do not recommend. For example, there is the kind which asks you to tear down the social and business institutions which this country has built up so successfully. It is easy enough to tear anything down, but the trouble with that policy is that after you have finished your job of tearing down you are done—there is nothing left to do—unless you build it up again—and that seems a silly kind of performance.

When any of these social wreckers say to you, "If you will follow my rules and regulations, you will be successful and happy," you just ask him to show his credentials, to give you the specifications of the kind of success he has achieved himself; or, if you don't like to ask him yourself, ask some other man in whom you have confidence, to advise you. He will be glad to do it.

A wise man knows there are too many kinds of individuals and too many kinds of successes to permit of a complete schedule of rules and regulations for success in life. If a young man aspires to be a bank president, he had better not waste his spare time in building electric motors; or, if he just can't keep his hands off copper wire and magnets, he had better shift his aim from a bank presidency to an electrician because he probably can't bring them both down at one shot. But, if any of you are just a plain boy like I was, and not a budding genius, then you must plod along on the principle that you will do well whatever you are doing, in order that, when the boss wants something else done well, he will pick you out as the one who has the habit of doing everything that way.

We ordinary ones must have considerable patience and care because we must go forward by main strength and persistence, and our shortcomings stand out like a sore thumb.

We have no great talent which offsets our deficiencies or excuses our delinquencies; in short, we must either make good or make room.

However, the Lord must have loved us because he made such a lot of us, and we average up in the real successes of life about as well as the brilliant ones who are sometimes dazzled by their own brilliancy.

But I don't care how much of a success you may make in business or in the professions, you will not be a success as men, if you fail to become good American citizens. A self-respecting laborer who loves this country and would fight for it as his home-land, is a better man than a multi-millionaire who migrates to a foreign land simply because he can buy more personal convenience or more of his particular brand of pleasure than he can here.

But it is necessary to do more than to love your country and to fight for it. You must also vote for it. The older men, and I suppose I should also say women without mentioning age, are passing down to you the greatest free government that ever existed upon this earth; and, in order to preserve it and pass it along in turn to your children, it is absolutely necessary for you to have a sense of your responsibilities as citizens and to do your duty as citizens.

This means that you must keep informed as to the great political issues which confront the country from time to time and also the local issues of the town and state in which you reside. You also must endeavor to understand the fundamentals of these public questions and then you must go to the polls and vote as your conscience dictates.

I am not suggesting that you become politicians unless you have a natural bent for it; but, if you will devote ten minutes a day to the public questions which are discussed in the newspapers, you will become better informed citizens than are a majority of the men of today.

I don't care which political party you belong to; in fact, I like to see the political parties pretty well balanced in strength because there is then set up a check and counter-check which is a factor of safety. No individual, organization, or political party can safely be trusted with absolute power.

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SOME OBSERVATIONS UPON SUCCESS IN LIFE

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I have discussed two major things by which I believe a man is measured—first, his degree of success in his vocation in life, and second, his value as a citizen of this great Republic, but there is a third and perhaps the most important and that is, his moral standing in the community.

The latter is the most difficult one of the three to generalize upon; but I believe, contrary to the usual impression, that it is one which involves problems in which the young man is a better guide to himself than he is in the other two, because business and politics require knowledge and experience, while a man's standard of social ethics is almost invariably founded upon the conscience which resides within himself. Moreover, when it comes to judging between right and wrong, I do not regard yours to be the dangerous age. The greater danger comes later in life and to those older men whose consciences have become seared and hardened.

Every time you do anything which your conscience tells you you ought not to do, you make it a little easier the next time to do a similar thing until, as the years go by, a conscience may shrivel up and become, as Disraeli once said, an accomplice instead of a guide.

Therefore, my advice to you is to pursue a course in life which will preserve that conscience of yours as a live pulsating thing upon which you can rely as safely when you are fifty as you can now in your youth.